

This document is a compilation of the recommendations made by the Iowa Watershed Task Force in 2001, the Iowa Water Summit in 2003 and the Iowa Watershed Quality Planning Task force in 2007.

IOWA WATERSHED TASKFORCE, 2001

Goal: Develop a Framework for Enhanced Cooperation and Coordination

Recommendations

1. Establish an on-going coordinating body to continue to address the watershed issues identified by this task force. Include similar representation from state, federal, and local agencies, nonprofits and commercial interests, as on the Watershed Task Force.

Create a “home” for coordinating entity within the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship – Division of Soil Conservation.

Specific services and/or functions provided by the water resources coordination body will include:

- serving as a liaison and point of contact on watershed issues with key resource and service providers linking state and federal agencies with local watershed interests;
- facilitating the connection and integration of programs/strategies currently done independently (example: wellhead protection and hazard mitigation);
- collaborating on opportunities for watershed-related training, development of a watershed clearinghouse of information and resources and development of Geographic Information System resources;
- building consensus on watershed issues among state, federal and local authorities; and
- developing an annual update on watershed programs, reporting on the progress to address the recommendations in this Watershed Task Force and other priorities established by the coordinating body.

2. Conduct a statewide needs assessment, in cooperation with appropriate local and federal entities, to identify and quantify water resource problems and funding needs. Base on each 11-digit HUC watershed in the state. Parameters for the inventory will include: land use, water uses, population, major point [43](#) and non-point sources of pollutants, floodplain management issues, identification of drinking water sources, existing water resource management practices and costs of estimated remediation practices.

Goal: Increase State Support for Watershed Protection

Recommendations

1. Establish a legislative study committee to explore in more detail the specific needs for financial support for watershed-related programs and sources of funding that could be utilized beyond the state’s General Fund. Higher levels of funding for water-related programs are critical to achieve the basic goals identified in this Task Force report, and to take better advantage of opportunities to leverage funds available from federal and other sources. Creative options that should be considered include additional mechanisms to charge fees based on polluting products or activities, credit trading, a usage-based tax added to water and sewer bills, a fraction of a percentage sales tax such as in Missouri, or a low-interest revolving loan fund similar to the Clean Water Act State Revolving Fund that is now used for sewer infrastructure projects.

2. Encourage state agencies with responsibilities for programs that impact the landscape, including the departments of transportation and economic development, to provide more active leadership and

accountability in conducting programs consistent with principles of sound watershed and floodplain management. Positive examples at the state level will set the stage for positive actions by local governments and individuals. First steps should be to assist staff with additional training and to review laws and authorities that relate to watershed and floodplain management activities, identifying needed readjustments or changes so that watersheds become a primary organizational focus for doing business rather than an add-on issue.

3. Establish an ongoing, staffed watershed clearinghouse for data and grant information. All government programs that fall under the umbrella of watershed management would provide detailed project information to the clearinghouse, based on an established, consistent format (see Appendix 4: Program Description Template for a Watershed Clearinghouse). The recommended location for the clearinghouse would be Iowa State University Extension, based on the model of the Missouri Watershed Information Network.

Practical tools for regional and local contacts and groups could include information such as:

- GIS maps of watershed units at different hydrologic scales
- Model of assessment, planning and evaluation worksheets
- Examples of watershed action plans from Iowa or the region
- Models for convening a group of representative stakeholders, with examples of different types of facilitation and surveys for landowner and residents
- Template news releases for publicity
- Data on water quality and quantity, and other issues identified by state coordination group
- Lists of technical and financial assistance for watershed efforts

4. Support the statewide water quality monitoring plan, developed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), with additional resources to move forward to finalize the plan and achieve priority goals, including meeting legislative requirements to provide credible data (see discussion in Section IV: Essential Tools for Watersheds).

5. Continue funding for GIS programs, as described by the Iowa Water Quality Initiative, and insure that local watershed organizations have free access and training to use computerized landscape information managed by the IDNR, the Iowa Geographic Information Council and other entities. Adequate staffing is critical to help people who do not have GIS technical resources or staff capacity. Establish a repository for GIS data produced for completed and on-going watershed projects, and link to the watershed clearinghouse.

6. Develop a sustainable, smart growth development initiative to address watershed goals, or consider expanding existing efforts like IDNR's "Rebuild Iowa" program that currently works with local communities primarily to address energy efficiency issues.

Goal: Build Local Capacity for Watershed Initiatives

Recommendations

1. Encourage and assist development of local watershed councils by providing state support and technical assistance. Local soil and water conservation districts will be the focal point for assistance, providing leadership and a point of contact for local watershed initiatives.
2. Revise current state watershed grant program guidelines to better support local watershed-oriented planning and implementation initiatives. Provide structure while allowing flexibility. Establish an ad-hoc committee that includes local watershed project coordinators to review procedures and consider items such as development of standard evaluation format and/or procedures that will provide a "base" set of reporting requirements to reduce paperwork, improve consistency and allow more effective quantification of results and comparisons between projects.

3. Increase the emphasis on watershed planning in grant programs. Make resources available to build local capacity in communities or regions for planning-related activities, such as problem assessment, outreach and group facilitation. Groups may also benefit from legal assistance to utilize opportunities for organizing under existing “subdistrict” legislation that applies to lake and water districts, sanitary districts or soil and water conservation districts.

Goal: Emphasize the Role of Watershed Efforts in Flood Hazard Mitigation

Recommendations

1. Work cooperatively with all levels of government to fund development and periodic updating of a system of floodplain mapping that is standardized and available on geographic information systems so that information on flood hazards is available in every community.
2. Fund increased floodplain education for local governments. Provide incentives for county government to better enforce existing floodplain laws and to develop tighter restrictions on new development in floodplain areas that are particularly hazard-prone.
3. Strengthen procedures for conducting environmental review of economic development funding when projects are proposed in flood-prone areas. Appropriate, low-impact development should be encouraged, and commercial and/or residential development discouraged in those areas. Guidelines should be established by the statewide coordination body that include a reporting procedure to document review process and resulting decisions.
4. Continue working to strengthen coordination between planning efforts in the areas of hazard mitigation, economic development and watershed protection.

Goal: Encourage Citizen Involvement

Recommendations

1. Initiate a public outreach and marketing campaign to build on existing and past efforts to increase awareness and appreciation of watershed issues. Work closely with local and regional watershed leaders to develop.
2. Continue to encourage involvement by diverse stakeholders in developing and leading watershed projects. Include nonprofit organizations, commercial interests and interested individuals, along with representatives of state, local and/or federal agencies. Where appropriate, provide financial assistance to bring in neutral facilitators skilled in community development to help build capacity for citizen leadership and decision-making. Also, provide additional training for state and local agency staff in working effectively with the public and encouraging citizen participation.
3. Support education efforts with youth and adults that heighten awareness, develop understanding and support local engagement on watershed issues. Effective programs to support include the Iowa Envirothon and aquatic education programs for youth, and the IOWATER citizen water quality monitoring and Adopt-a-Stream programs that primarily involve adults.
4. Increase the emphasis on addressing local social and economic issues in watershed programs.

IOWA WATER SUMMIT, 2003

RECOMMENDATION

- Develop a plan for building local capacity for watershed councils using principles set forward in the Watershed Task Force Report
- Utilize existing authority under Iowa Code for watershed improvement. Optimize the ability to leverage additional resources at the local level. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Soil Conservation Districts should provide the leadership to develop a funding coordination plan. (Drainage districts, watershed sub-districts, storm water utilities, 28E agreements, etc.)

RECOMMENDATION

Dedicated and sustainable state funding to protect water quality in Iowa by:

- Increased priority ranking of Environment First Fund,
- Re-direct sales tax collected on drinking and bottled water,
- Utilize revenues from the lottery and develop an unending dedicated game focusing on Iowa's natural resources,
- All fees and fines used to re-capture costs and reinvest in water quality in the affected area, and,
- Expand remediation role of the Iowa Underground Storage Tank Fund to better protect groundwater and surface water.

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RECOMMENDATION

- To receive Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or economic development grants the applicant must assure water quality protection and improvement where possible.

RECOMMENDATION

- Municipal wastewater permit fees should at least cover the cost of program administration.

RECOMMENDATION

- Accelerate research and demonstration projects for alternative methods of management and improvement of aging drainage infrastructure systems emphasizing agronomic, economic and water quality issues. Recommend the Governor appoint a state university to lead this effort and appoint an advisory board of stakeholders to develop a plan identifying work elements, time frames and costs.

RECOMMENDATION

- Streamline the SRF loan process and implement a continuous loan process for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) by putting an experienced lending entity in charge of loans.
- Appoint a permanent SRF advisory committee of stakeholders to assess the efficiencies and effectiveness of the program and make recommendations for processing reform and financing terms.
- Maximize the leverage of EPA's capitalization grants. Loan programs should generate sufficient income to fund administration of the loan program and contribute to clean water programs.
- Increase use of Clean Water SRF for non-point source programs
- Increase use of Drinking Water SRF set-aside for source water protection

-Assist *Sponsored Projects (1)* for watershed improvement under the Clean and Drinking Water SRF.

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RECOMMENDATION

-The Governor has the leadership responsibility to coordinate funding, staff and programs to improve the effectiveness of all state programs with water resource related responsibilities. Therefore, the Governor through Executive Order should insist on cooperation and coordination between all state agencies. The Governor should issue invitations to local, federal and public agencies, non-profit organizations and businesses to participate in addressing any resource impacting water quality and watershed management.

-Once ordered the Governor with input from a stakeholder group will initiate, oversee, and implement a needs assessment and a clean water action plan.

-Improve results based targeting of state resources for water quality. (The best outcome for the dollars invested.)

RECOMMENDATION

-The Governor, legislature and Iowa's Congressional Delegates have a responsibility to work for changes in federal funding and policy issues to better target Midwestern states water quality issues.

-Develop a multi state coalition to lobby for changes in current and future federal water quality funding and policies

-Work with appropriate federal agencies to accelerate technical and financial assistance for water quality issues in the Midwest.

-Seek a special designation from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to act as a pilot project for water quality enhancement and improvement programs. The pilot project would include access to federal funds to target measurable, results-based watershed projects to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus in Iowa.

-Within the Conservation Title of the current Farm Bill use all appropriate funding tools such as the Conservation Security Program to improve water quality.

WATERSHED QUALITY PLANNING TASK FORCE, 2007

1. **Creation of a Water Resource Coordinating Council.** The WRCC under the direction of the Governor is recommended with a common goal to develop an integrated approach to water resource management, and which recognizes the insufficiency of current approaches, programs, practices, funding and utilization of current funding programs. This approach seeks to overcome old polarities such as quantity versus quality, land versus water, the chemical versus the physical and biological, supply versus demand, political boundaries versus hydrologic boundaries and point versus non-point. This approach seeks to manage water comprehensively rather than compartmentally. The purpose of this recommendation is to coordinate programs, not to duplicate or supersede agency authorities and responsibilities. **Funding Recommendation: None**
2. **Develop a Water Quality Research and Marketing Campaign.** The task force recommends a marketing campaign be undertaken by public agencies and other organizations to rekindle the conservation ethic in all Iowans. Surveys indicate citizen's desire for improvement in water quality. Other surveys show that citizens don't understand the problems with local water quality. **Funding Recommendation: \$1 million for year one development**
3. **Larger (Regional) Watershed Assessment, Planning and Prioritization.** The state should support creating, publishing and updating periodically a Regional Watershed Assessment (RWA) program at a larger watershed scale, such as the Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC – a federal term that delineates watersheds) 8 scale. There are approximately 56 HUC 8 size watershed units delineated in Iowa. A goal is to assess 11 HUC 8 size watersheds per year for 5 years to eventually cover the entire state. The Rapid Watershed Assessment tool used by Iowa NRCS, for example, is one assessment process that may be used. A regular review and update of these assessments should also be planned. **Funding recommendation: \$5 million annually**
4. **Smaller (Community-Based) Watershed Assessment, Planning, Prioritization and Implementation.** Once a regional watershed assessment is completed at the HUC 8 scale, planned projects of a manageable scope can be implemented. Priority sub-watersheds at a HUC 12 or smaller scale can reasonably be recruited and provided more resources for planning. A sub-watershed plan should include objectives, a thorough local assessment of the physical, social, and financial resources of the watershed, an analysis of the alternatives, and an implementation plan that includes an evaluation process to measure results. **Funding Recommendation: \$5 million annually.**
5. **Support for Smaller (Community-Based) Watershed Monitoring and Measurement.** In addition to current support for water monitoring, the state should provide technical and financial support for locally-based watershed monitoring and measurement. This monitoring would be custom designed to provide information on

essential water resource questions facing the community. Local communities would first be able to use this information to support enhanced planning, local data collection, and thus helping them identify priority areas to target limited resources. **Funding**

Recommendations: \$2.5 million annually.

6. **Wastewater and Stormwater Treatment Infrastructure.** We all live in a watershed. Impacts to water quality come from a variety of sources, including both rural and urban, nonpoint and point sources. Challenges for point sources and communities can have a significant impact on watershed conditions from storm water and wastewater. Aging wastewater and combined sewer/storm water infrastructure issues are having negative impacts on water quality. Also, compliance with current and future water quality standards may be cost-prohibitive for many communities. **Funding Recommendation: None.**